BOOKBINDING
FOR BIBLIOPHILES

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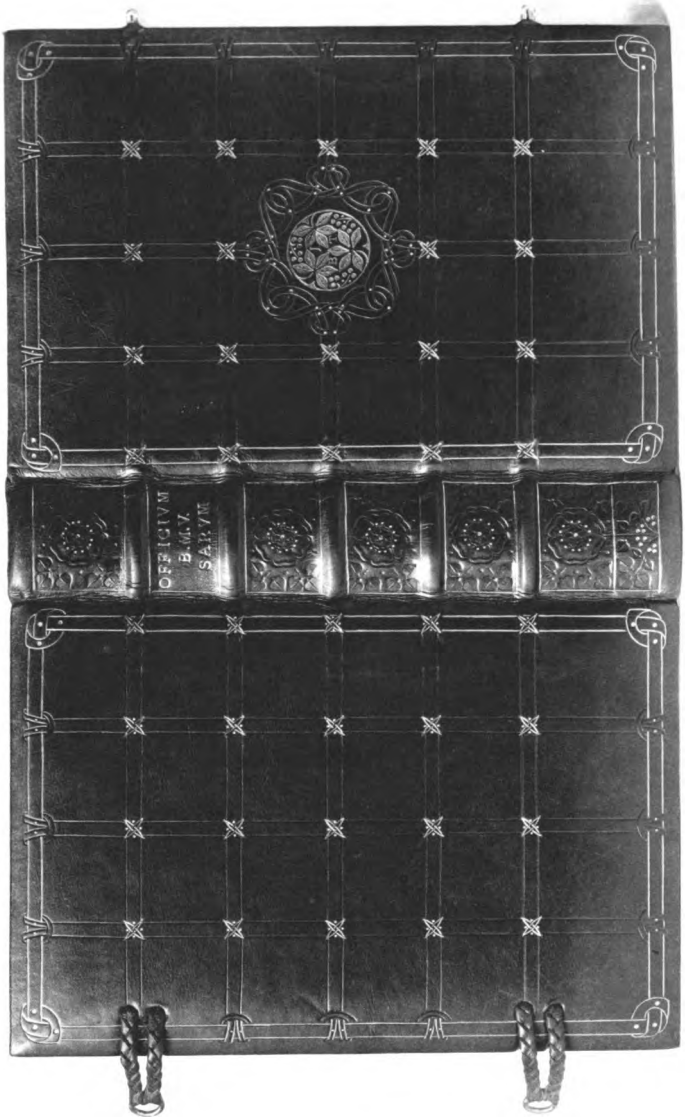

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BOOKBINDING
FOR BIBLIOPHILES

BEING NOTES ON SOME TECHNICAL FEATURES OF THE WELL BOUND BOOK FOR THE AID OF CONNOISSEURS

TOGETHER WITH
A SKETCH OF GOLD TOOLING
ANCIENT AND MODERN

BY
FLETCHER BATTERSHALL

LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR

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TO

DOUGLAS COCKERELL

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INTRODUCTION

THIS is not a technical treatise on bookbinding, neither is it a history of the craft. These fields have been covered ably by others. The appeal is to the collector and book-lover — to those who love the book in its physical being, as an *objet d'art*, apart from the literary value of the thought expressed. The cult is ancient, and numbers now as of old its enthusiasts and its satirists. It has its own apologetics. The author is content to step aside from the controversy. Let us not take our bric-a-brac too seriously, but stand ready to enjoy the humor of our folly, as well as its charm and its delight.

The finely bound book is an article of virtu. But as such it has its laws, its

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own little philosophy and rule of being. One cannot know it to be good or bad without knowing the history of its structure. Was it built on sound principles? Does it fulfill the full purpose of a binding? Is its beauty a proper and natural beauty, the inevitable efflorescence which the structure was destined to call forth? There is one beauty of the sea, and another of the hill. The beauty of the bound book differs from the beauty of a shoe lachet, because it follows a different growth to serve a different purpose. The connoisseur is he who, holding the work in hand, can point out in how far each follows its organic law. It is to aid the Bibliophile to such knowledge that the present work is written.

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CONTENTS

PART FIRST: FORWARDING

I	Of Mending and Repairing	3
II	Of Pressing; With a Note on Collation	15
III	Of End Papers	21
IV	Of Leather Joints, and of Sewing	31
V	Of Rounding, of Backing, and of Boarding	41
VI	Of Edges and Edge Gilding	53
VII	Of Headbands	65
VIII	Of the Choice of Leathers	73
IX	Of Covering	83

PART SECOND: FINISHING

I	Gold Tooling: the Technique	93
II	Gold Tooling in Italy	103
III	Gold Tooling in France	113
IV	Gold Tooling of To-day	125

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PART FIRST

FORWARDING

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I

OF MENDING AND REPAIRING

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I

OF MENDING AND REPAIRING

THE Bibliophile should have a part in the binding of his books. They should reflect his personality equally with that of the craftsman. There are few possessions more personal and intimate, reflecting the owner, not in their selection only, but in their physical being. How carefully the book-lover considers the edition of the work which he sets out to acquire! Shall it be ancient, full of the atmosphere of the century which gave it birth, quaint in typography, and imprinted on the honest hand-made papers of an unsophisticated age?—or shall it be a modern *edition de luxe*, one of three hundred numbered copies, a manufactured rarity? The decision reflects the character of the collector.

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And so it is with the selection of a binding.

It is here proposed to speak of the technical features of fine book binding. The knowledge of the amateur is too often confined to schools of tooling. Of equal importance is some knowledge of the various technical characteristics of a well bound book. For, in technique there is nearly as wide a choice as in decoration, and for the best treatment of the particular book there should be not only a selection of materials but a choice in the mode of handling them. Indeed, no sound artistic judgment of decoration can be made without some knowledge of the technical problems with which the craftsman copes. Did he conquer them? Is the workmanship sound, and worthy of embellishment? These are the first questions; and only after answering them may one judge whether the decoration follows, a natural and harmonious overtone. Of this sort is the education of the connoisseur. An expert knowledge of fine prints must be founded upon an understanding of the technical difficulties

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with which the artist struggled. It is much the same with bookbinding.

I will speak only of the finest bookbinding — of the workmanship which is lavished on a work of peculiar rarity, or, it may be, not rare, but particularly beloved; of the books which one honors above their fellows — the nobility of the cabinet. Thus, if some of the requirements appear to be exacting, it will be remembered that they are not an every-day affair, and that one may place on his shelves many books in neat half morocco with less forethought and far less strain upon the purse. What is said is not in disparagement of these.

It is generally the old book, the book which is *very* rare and precious, one of a known number which has dodged the catastrophes of a century or so, that comes up for binding. As a rule, if a contemporary covering is still decently sound upon its back, it is best to let it stay there. One cannot better it. This binding, frayed though it may be, is more intimate with the nature of the book than any you can substitute. Of course, if it is a fine binding of the

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period, or stamped with the arms or *chiffre* of some bibliophile, noble, learned, or beautiful, the question is settled once for all. No matter how dingy and ragged, let it stay; at the most, let the worst wounds be healed by the habile hands of the repairer. A wide gulf is fixed betwixt repairer and restorer. The repairer replaces and strengthens the crumbling shreds of board and leather, builds up the ruin of the head-band,—goes little farther, in fact, than to prevent a further dissolution. The restorer may, with specially cut tools, regild the dulled design. Hold him in suspicion. Your book is better as it is, "black with tarnished gold."

But if the old covering is without importance; if, though old, it is some centuries later than the imprint, and is out of touch with the true spirit of the book, (which is not infrequently the case,) here is a book for re-binding. Moreover, the old binding may be even a menace, sown with mould and infecting day by day the precious leaves within. Then let it be stripped away

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(by the binder, of course,) and we are ready to plan a new one.

But here it may be evident that there is preliminary work. It is a long journey from the XVth or XVIth century to the present day, a journey perilous, especially to books. Yes, though by some rare chance it had owned a lover such as Francois Villon, he thumbed it doubtless in some thieves' kitchen with fingers oily of the fat goose; or, were the larder less propitious, dodged it one day — and the imprecations of his *Gros Margot.* Then there were the long days on the quais when fine rain soaked between the pages, or the dust of the hot summer noon sifted to its marrow. How many times did it escape the bagman by a hair's breadth!

Adventures such as these are written on its pages; and now, before binding, it is necessary that the book be washed and mended. Here is an art in itself — a charming yet patient art, one of minute labors, and of expense. But it is necessary to the rare book if damp and decay was really seated in its fibre.

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The very substance which supports the precious text is crumbling from beneath.

And as to washing: A book may be so washed as to leave the paper dazzling white, whiter and fairer often than when first imprinted. There are two objections which the Bibliophile may raise. First, that the natural mellow tint is lost, and for this, among other charms, we prized it. Second, unless the work be done with scrupulous honesty, our book remains a whited sepulchre, fair to behold, but full of acid fermentations. Most bleaching solutions contain chlorine, either in the form of chloride of lime or as hydrochloric acid, both of which agents, together with oxalic and nitric acids, are used in various ways in washing books. Most stains which are only of the surface fade in a heated solution of powdered alum; grease yields to heat and blotting paper, applied with patient repetition; but damp, fox-marks and ink-stains call for more heroic treatment. Unless the workman has a conscience, unless he neutralizes every trace of chlorine with the proper acids,

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unless, again, by scrupulous and repeated washing he removes every trace of this neutralizing acid, there remains a destructive element in the fibre of the leaf.

And again: Every book that is washed, whether bleached or not, should be re-sized. In the paper-mill, as each fibre of linen settles to its place, it is intimately coated with a size of gelatines and soap, which binds the leaf together. In washing and bleaching much of this is washed away; the paper is left fragile, subject to easy tears, and unprotected from inroads by damp and mildew. This lost sizing should always be replaced. In fact, very poor paper, such as was used in many ephemeral tracts, now of great rarity, may be given greater strength by re-sizing than it originally possessed. Often the sole vice of the spotted page is that its original size has perished by natural decay. The surface is soft and fuzzy. It delights in tearing. A bath in hot size is all that is needed — but the need is imperative.

I know many lovers of old books

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who have an ineradicable prejudice against any "washing," and prefer the page as it is, spotted with decay. They overlook the fact that there is a great difference between chemical bleaching, and a mere bath in pure water followed by re-sizing. The former is as evil as they think; the latter is no evil, but a proper and necessary care. If rightly done, the decay (a progressive process) is cut short, and the page is restored to a life and health which it may enjoy for years to come.

The Bibliophile is happy if his book has all its corners, is free from the burrow of the bookworm, and exists leaf by leaf in its integrity. If not, a still more minute labor remains for the repairer. There is a great difference between a tear mended or corner replaced by a skillful craftsman and the mere patching and pasting which anyone can do. Before the work of the master, one wonders how the thing was done. Seen by reflected light, the lost corner has grown again, self-renewed, it seems, by some strange power such as possess those happy lower animals

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which, growing a new leg, come forth remade for the struggle for existence. Only by transmitting light is the cicatrice apparent. There is a curious welding of the torn edges, and the new piece is marvelously grafted in the very substance of the old. The den of the bookworm is filled up, and his passage is unmarked save only where the text has nourished his vile body, and the text itself can be fac-similed by a skillful draughtsman. These wonders of surgery are worked with *papier pourri* or semi-liquid paper, from which the mender makes new paper as genuine as that of the original vat.

This is the sort of mending which a precious book demands. If there is much of it to be done; if, page by page, some minute attention is required, the artist is well deserving of the Bibliophile for his infinite pains — this minor kind of genius.

Here, as in many arts of patience, the French excel, and even amateurs follow the calling with delight. To the Bibliophile I recommend the book of M. Bonnardot, who, in the early

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century, pursued fine prints and *bouquins* on the quais of Paris. With charm, and at times fine passion, he treats of the little art of repairing prints and books.

This is: *Essai sur l'art de restaurer les Estampes et les Livres* . . . Par A. Bonnardot. Second édition, refondue et augmentée...Paris...Castel ... 1858. "*Volume de toute rarete*," adds the cataloguer.

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II

OF PRESSING: WITH A NOTE ON COLLATION

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II

OF PRESSING: WITH A NOTE ON COLLATION

THE ancient bookbinder, before sewing, beat his books with a heavy hammer; and in Jost Ammon's well-known book of trades we see him at this preliminary, but necessary task. To-day, however, powerful hydraulic and steam presses have superseded the old beating stone, and, in fact, do better work. On beating or pressing depends the final solidity of the book. Paper as it comes from the printing press is somewhat spongy, filled with minute particles of air, and the folded leaves do not lie intimately, each against the other. Pressing expels the air, and when properly done results

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in an admirable solidity and a book locked against damp and dust.

There are two precautions to be kept in mind; first, as to old books, and then as to books which are too new.

The old hand presses of early days, exquisite as was the work which they turned out, had, nevertheless, faults of which the modern binder must take count. The impression was often too heavy; the paper was embossed, so to speak, and, not infrequently, weakened by the depth of the impression. Sometimes, in fact, under an undiscriminating pressure by the binder, the letters come away, neatly cut out, or, again, the leaf parts along the margin of the text. A cautious binder having a rare book in hand will avoid this accident by carefully considered pressure.

With books fresh from printing there is another danger. The ink may not have hardened, and in pressing the text may "set off" and appear reversed upon the neighboring page. The Bibliophile himself should forestall this catastrophe by putting off the day of binding — always a wise plan, if, in the

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meanwhile, the book receives the proper care. This danger of "set-off" is always present in books with plates. As a rule fine plates should never share the pressing of the text. Etchings, engravings, and all illustrations by processes where the ink is in relief, lose in brilliancy, or "smudge" under too heavy pressure.

If the Bibliophile is an "extra illustrator" he will have indicated the place where each borrowed plume shall be stuck in. And this brings one to a matter which in every instance is preliminary to delivery to the binder; that is to say, *collation*.

Every bibliophile collates his book on getting it. Without this he is no Bibliophile, a normal and unfevered mortal merely — deserving the wretched books that he will buy, sans fly leaves, advertisements, misprints, *everything*. It is collation marks the Bibliophile, and if he arises surreptitiously at night to re-collate, then is he greater than the mere Bibliophile, he is *bibliomane* — true man of passion and delight.

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But there is method in this madness; for after collation one should indicate in his letter to the binder the misplaced signature, and the fact that A, which is blank, is on no account to be used to line the back; and one may add, too, that he loves the advertisements, and that the original wrappers are to be bound in as they stand, or at the back, as one's taste runs. If the book is in cloth, one will not (while the present standard lasts) have it bound at all, but will save it unappareled to be cast out by executors or next of kin; serving still, it is true, the general cause of bibliomania by enhancing the value of our neighbor's copy, which then will be the only one extant. Yet if, in spite of fashion, one has it bound, he should warn the binder that the original covers are to be bound in.

These are, or should be, the rich fruits of collation. The cautious binder, on his part, will collate the book himself. He, at least, cannot afford to be charged with missing pages which never came into his hands.

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III

OF END PAPERS

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III

OF END PAPERS

END papers have as much to do with the general appearance of a book as any other feature, except the covering, decoration, and treatment of the edges. By end papers the binder understands that collection of leaves, some white, some colored, which are placed at the beginning and end of the book, and are not part of the printed work itself. It is a matter in which the Bibliophile himself may take a part. In one view it is purely a matter of taste; from another there are technical considerations.

As to the white leaves which flank the body of the book; have enough of them. Three are none too many. They are the only proper place for bibliographical remarks, or stamps, or signatures. Then again, a book which

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opens immediately upon the title always has a mean appearance. There is no paper too good for these white leaves, but there is a matter always to be borne in mind. They must be of the same character as the paper of the book. It is distressing to see highly calandered modern paper cheek to cheek with the fine, mellow, water-lined paper of other centuries. They quarrel hopelessly; yet here is an error of which inconsiderate binders are often guilty. The same is true of the juxta-position of a pure white paper with one which age has mellowed. The worthy binder of rare books has by him a large assortment of ancient paper, so that he may match as nearly as possible the pages of the book.

The colored end paper, however, is wholly a decorative element. It greets one on opening the cover, with which, therefore, it should always have relation. I say end *paper;* by this I mean also ends of silk or satin, of parchment, as also papers printed or marbled; all materials, in fact, which are fitted for the purpose. Marbled paper is the

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convention. For nine out of ten books, it serves as portal and as exit. In the earlier days of the craft it had artistic excellence, and moreover, a practical *raison d'etre*. It was made by the binder in his own shop at a time when other decorated papers were few and hard to find. It is supposed to be Dutch in origin, dating from the XVIIth century; but Mr. Horne points out that the *Sylva Sylvarum* of Francis Bacon, London, 1627, relates that "The Turks have a pretty art of chamoletting of paper which is not with us in use." Previous to this, papers were in use stamped with grotesque diapers in color.

It would seem that to-day the reason for this excessive use of marbled paper has passed away. The vitality and naive charm of the early marbled papers has evaporated in the modern improvement of the art. Our marbles are much more elaborate, combining a palette-full of colors, veined with gold often, truly "superior" in finish. It is a matter of taste; but it appears to be a rule, that among marbled papers those

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sober and of small design are most pleasing in effect. A large design is always a solecism in a *petit* book: and it seems to me that the charming little "combs" are more attractive, more luxurious indeed, than the gaudy effects of the trade. M. Octave Uzanne in his *Reliure Moderne*, Paris, 1887, is vehement in urging the use of new materials. He commends the use of Japanese decorated papers, landscapes, birds, or flower subjects; of any novelty, indeed, so long as it is new. "*Je preche donc le mepris du convenu.*" The revolt has its provocation; yet, to every art, there remains a true convention, to be over-stepped at the peril of absurdity. Fitness is the test — the fitness of the material to the use. Within this convention there is all latitude.

Early bindings, such as those of Grolier, had usually ends of vellum or pure white paper. In some hands nothing is more beautiful — witness some of the recent books of the Dove's Bindery. Mr. Cockerell uses frequently a self-colored paper of soft military grey. The effect is charming when set against

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his Niger leather. The field is wider than is at first apparent. There are many beautiful and fine papers which await the discerning Bibliophile. Still more, here is an untrodden field for the decorative artist. Patterns for wall papers, carpets, oilcloths, and fabrics are poured out *ad infinitum*; yet it has occurred to few designers that in end papers there is a field for fine endeavor. Mr. Rossetti and others have, now and then, designed end papers for particular books; but so far as I know little designing for the trade has been attempted. The future, it may be, will lie in stamped papers, with diaper or running designs, wherein the merit shall be as much in form as color.

To speak of "ends" of watered silk or satin: These have a precedent of a century or so. But more particularly are they associated in our minds with the charming books of the XVIIIth century illustrated by Cochin, Gravelot or Eisen. One of these books, bound by Derome, with a fly and doublure of silk or satin, is an artistic whole, contemporary in all respects;

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text, illustration, binding reflect equally an eighteenth century sentiment, light, charming and rococo. And though there are examples of such doublures of very early date, it will seem to most minds an artistic impossibility to place one in an Aldine classic, or in a Caxton.

There are practical considerations, too. A book with silk flies ever requires the most tender care, immaculate fingers, a glazed cabinet, and to do well by it, a slip case to exclude all dust. There are few things more forlorn than a frayed and dingy satin fly. Still, they are always permissible, if one desires the particular effect. All things, inanimate as well as living, have their sex. The book is masculine; "*le livre*," says the Frenchman, and I doubt not that the same feeling lurks in the sentiment of the English bibliophile. Books satin lined are in some degree effeminate — a proper treatment for some books, when one comes to think of it.

The doublure of leather is ancient and imposing — consecrated to the *chef d'œuvre* of the craftsman. It shares

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equally with the outer board in decoration, and at times takes the lion's share. It is always expensive, and few are the Bibliophiles who boast of many examples. In decoration it should differ from, but be in strict harmony with, the outer tooling. In color equally should it differ from the outside, but match as nearly as may be the adjoining fly. Historically it is in harmony with the oldest books; for one must dispel the illusion that past centuries were sombre, and that the luxury of the book-lover is a new thing. Perpetually we discover our extravagances in the past.

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IV

OF LEATHER JOINTS AND OF SEWING

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IV

OF LEATHER JOINTS AND OF SEWING

CLOSELY related to the choice of end papers is the matter of leather joints. Is the book to have a doublure? If so, a leather joint is essential. Not only does the joint change the aspect of the inner cover by making it a panel; but it is utilitarian as well. It strengthens the binding in its weakest point. Of all the dilapidated bindings which the past bequeaths to us, the majority are broken in the joint. Either the outer leather itself has parted and the boards hang loose on the cords which bind them to the back, or else the interior joint has parted from the body of the book. A leather joint safeguards both of these mishaps.

The folio or heavy quarto is far

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stronger with a leather joint. The weight of such a book always threatens to tear it from its cover; and thus some reinforcement of the inner joint becomes physically necessary. With small books, however, the case is different, and the smaller the book, the less effective is the leather joint. This because to flex easily under the light board, the leather must be pared so thin that in actual strength it is inferior to paper. In sizes below 16mo, the leather joint is almost wholly decorative; its physical *raison d'etre* has ceased to exist.

In all cases the best construction requires that both the leather joint and end papers be sewn with the book. If this is not done (and this is frequently the case even in bindings of fine exterior) the end paper and joint will some day part company with the printed text, and the sham be hideously revealed.

As to sewing: If there be one element vital above others, it is the sewing. Strip the craft of the last non-essential, and sewing yet remains. A

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book sewed is a book bound — after a fashion. And though this vital structure is always hidden from the view, the true book-lover will be satisfied with none but the best sewing — he must feel that the foundation of the work is the best that can be had.

Silk is the only true material. It has the greatest strength in the least bulk. It is pliable and soft, and will bind together papers of the tenderest texture. Above all, it defies damp, mould and the ravening worm.

But the selection of the best material by no means states the problem. There are two standard modes of sewing — "flexible" sewing, and sewing upon cords buried in saw-cuts in the back. Upon the choice of these depends the whole character of the binding and, I might almost say, its artistic integrity.

Flexible sewing is the most ancient and the best of methods — the only method, in fact, in which the familiar bands which decorate and give character to our books are more than a pretense. Without going into detail, the

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process is as follows: in this method the back of the book is never sawed, but the sections, one after the other, are placed against upright cords, and the sewer carrying the thread along the interior of the section passes it through the back, around the cord, and then to the interior again, repeating the operation as each cord is reached. Thus, each section is firmly bound to as many cords as we see on the back when the book is covered; thus, also, in this practice the bands — the true ribs and framework of the book, — have a physical *raison d'etre*. The bands are "real bands," as the craftsman says, and the Bibliophile of a true taste will delight in this visible and beautiful construction, and (in little) his eye will find the same pleasure as in following the lines of support in a perfectly constructed building.

All the old books were sewed thus; though at times strips of parchment or leather were used instead of cords, and thereby resulted in a flat back. This was the Dutch method. Flexible sewing is the ideal method, whether the

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bands be raised or flat. No other construction is so strong, so permanent and consistent.

It was for the eighteenth century to discover the method of sawing books, and a way to cheap and easy sewing. Ninety-nine books out of one hundred are thus sewn at the present day.

The process briefly is as follows: The sections placed together are sawed across the back, the cut being deep enough to hold the cords on which the book is to be sewed. The thread, instead of encircling the cords — always of necessity thinner and weaker than raised bands — passes under them. Thus, when the sewing is finished, there is no projection on the back. Then again, books sewed in this manner do not have the leather pasted directly to the sections; but instead, a double fold of paper is pasted on the back, which, when the book opens, springs apart and we have the familiar "hollow" or "spring" back. This treatment has its uses and at times a peculiar fitness; yet its merits are over-balanced by its defects.

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The advantages are these: cheapness, rapidity in sewing; and, what is more patent to the reader, the book opens more easily — but, alas! does this by reason of intrinsic frailty. The defects are these: the book itself is deeply scored by sawing; the bands on which the book is sewn are fewer, weaker; the leather covering, which in the other method is a great source of strength, becomes here a nearly useless adjunct, a decoration chiefly, fair without but "hollow" within — to become eventually a mere flap of leather, hanging by fragments here and there. The visible bands, if the book has any, are sham, aping the classical construction.

In choosing between these two methods the true bibliophile will not hesitate, except perhaps in peculiar instances subsequently to be noted.

Have your book sewn "flexible," in the craftsman's phrase, or, as Roger Payne has it in his quaint letter to Lord Spencer: "Bound in the very best manner, sewed with Silk, *every Sheet round every Band, not false Bands.* . . ."

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Sewing is hidden; how shall the Bibliophile distinguish between the methods when holding the finished product in his hand? In general there are two features which betray the sawed book. First, if one pries down at the center of a signature, the track of the saw and the inlaid cords are visible. Second, if on opening the book the back springs from the outer leather (if it be a "hollow" or "spring" back) then the book is probably sawed; unless, indeed, the book be sewed after the Dutch method, flexible on strips of parchment; or in trade parlance "flexible not to show"—a modification of the Dutch method where cords are substituted for parchment but are hammered into the back. The first test is alone decisive (though at times a dangerous experiment) for some binders by heavy lining give such rigidity to the back that the hollow never appears; and the book can be opened so as to see the cords only at the expense of a broken back.

There is still another feature which may be examined—the bands them-

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selves. Are they false bands? The more neatly the leather covers them the more likely they are false. The real band is a round cord; the imitation is a strip of parchment, square in its angles and more easily covered with the leather. Again: are the bands at the exact point where the cords are laced into the boards?—a fact sometimes to be made out by a slight protuberance on the outer leather, or by an irregularity in the inner joint. If so, the bands are real. There is no sure test when the work comes from a craftsman of the greatest skill. If all signs fail there is still instinct, that unconscious reasoning from experience which seldom errs.

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V

OF ROUNDING, OF BACKING, AND OF BOARDING

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V

OF ROUNDING, OF BACKING, AND OF BOARDING

ROUNDING and backing stand together and include the various steps by which the back is shaped and the grooves made in which the covers lie.

The book is sewed; and the craftsman, knocking the back upon a flat surface, brings all the sections in alignment. Thus the back is flat and in this condition the book is lowered into the press. If examined, it will be seen that each section is slightly separated from its neighbor, the back forming a series of parallel gutters. These the workman fills with hot, thin glue. When the excess is removed in subsequent manipulations, each section will be bound firmly to the other. At this point however the glue is not allowed

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to harden; but as soon as it is fairly set and still tacky to the touch, the book is taken from the press, and with a hammer, the workman gives that degree of convexity which the particular book demands. Here we have a choice. Does the Bibliophile prefer a flat back or a back well rounded? Between the the two extremes all degrees of curvature are possible. Yet there are structural matters to be considered. The back is in some degree a hinge upon which each leaf swings as we turn the pages. There is danger that a perfectly flat back will become concave with use. Thus, for security a slight rounding is always better, but it should not be excessive. In this as in all things there is a golden mean. And then, too, the degree of curvature upon the back will be duplicated in the concave of the fore-edge and the more of this, the easier will the leaves turn under the finger which releases them. The natural curve that the back takes under pressure is in general the best. This will be determined by the amount of thread used in sewing. A thick book

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of many sections will take a greater curvature than a thin book holding little thread.

The book, now rounded and with the glue still malleable, is placed in the press between "backing boards" — strips of wood with a feather-edge. They are placed from the back a distance nearly equal to the thickness of the boards. The press is tightened; the craftsman hammers the sections right and left, welding them over the backing boards, forming thus the groove or rabbit in which the cover is to lie. The glue is now allowed to harden.

In the meantime, the boards have been prepared. There are many qualities of board, and, Bibliophile, none but the best is good enough for your best books. Tend you your treasure never so carefully, the time may come when it slips from careless fingers (never from your fingers!) and, after the nature of books, will strike upon its corner. If the boards are poor, the scar remains and one is fortunate if the leather itself is not split. How many thousand bent and ragged corners have

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you passed while book hunting! If the binder has used anything but the *very* best of boards, the time may come when the book whose safety and beauty are now your care will wound you, Bibliophile, with its own poor wounded corner. Nothing is beyond destruction; but I may say that a book clad in the *very* best of boards may pass through many a fall with very little damage. I regret to say that the very best of boards are not a product of our native land.

Rounded corners are safer, though ugly; but the very slightest bit taken from the extreme point of the corner is, perhaps, an added beauty. One feels the increased strength, and there is some slight touch of the antique about it.

It is apparent that the proper thickness of the board must be determined by the size and thickness of the book — to a degree, also, by its character. A venerable and learned tome, whose black letter was at one time pressed by wooden covers, can, naturally and by education, stand proportionally thicker

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boards than a dainty and frivolous eighteenth century "*livre a vignettes.*" The Bibliophile and the binder can unite in good taste at this point.

The board should always be covered on both sides with paper. This gives strength, makes it less liable to warp, as well as prevents the tar and other ingredients from staining the fine leather which is to cover it.

The size to which the boards are cut is determined by whether the book is to be uncut or have its edges gilded — a solemn question, treated in the following chapter. It is determined, too, by the amount of projection ("square") to be left beyond the edge. The "square" protects the edge; it lifts it above the shelf and stands out bravely to receive the blow. It should be sufficient for this, but no more. Its size should be measured by its purpose; and it is evident that an excessive "square," unsupported by the body of the book, is itself liable to be disfigured. In general the tendency is to make the square too large. The old binders were more moderate in this respect.

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The squares of a trimmed book should all be equal — top, fore-edge and tail — though perhaps the latter should be a trifle greater, to allow for a certain amount of sag in the book itself. The squares on uncut edges must necessarily be great to cover irregularities.

The binder next concerns himself with the bands on which the book is sewed. He ravels the loose ends, impregnates them with paste, and laces them at least twice through holes pierced in the boards. Where they pass from the back to the first hole, they are countersunk. They are drawn tight and the waste cut off; then, with each board put between plates of tin, the whole book is subjected to the heaviest pressure it has yet received. Some binders, to save time and trouble, cut away some of the cords; and thus, though the book is sewed upon five cords, only three may be laced into the boards. This should not be done, except, perhaps, in very small books; and even in these cases there will be greater artistic honesty if the book is sewn upon fewer bands.

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Before the heavy pressing, however, the glued back is covered with flour paste which softens and amalgamates with the excess of glue. The excess is scraped away, and the back rubbed smooth and even. Thus, in the perfectly bound book there remains but a surprisingly small amount of adhesive matter; for, strange to say, in much glue there is weakness and not strength.

If the binding is to be "flexible" — the ideal method, — the leather in the final covering will be pasted directly to the back, on the paper of the sections in fact, and worked down between the projecting bands.

But, even if bound "flexible," the nations stand divided on the degree of flexibility to be allowed. The modern Frenchman's "flexible" back is as hard as adamant — unless it breaks; while the Englishman's "flexible" back is more flexible, and at times is actually observed to flex. Which of the two is the better? The question is important. The deciding facts are these: books are printed upon paper because paper is a flexible material,

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bending without breaking, and lying smoothly as we turn the pages. If the paper of your book has this prime quality, *i. e.*, if you can bend it, a solid back has great advantages. The leaf turns on itself, is its own hinge in truth; and the back, lined with a coating of strong paper, or better still, of thin leather, stands a solid foundation for tooling which will never flake away. One sees that "flexible" is a mere craftsman's word, and only indicates the method of the work.

Suppose, however, that you have one of our modern "thick paper copies"—a book printed on inchoate cardboard, on a paper which misses the whole purpose of paper, on a detestable and unholy material, made by the devil for the purpose of ensnaring souls. Or —to go a step further—suppose that your book is printed on china slabs.

What then? How will you bind it?—for the book *must* open. In this case the back must be flexible to the last degree; and you will have the satisfaction of looking forward to the day when the tooling will chip in

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pieces from the back, and it may be, the back itself will break. Or, you have the alternative of the hollow or spring back, which will break more readily, with catastrophe to the joints thrown in.

Of course the Bibliophile will never buy a book on coated paper, if he can help it. He wants his clay tablets of an earlier date. Every bookbinder wishes likewise that he would refuse books on "thick" paper. The paper-maker may retort: "This is merely craft egotism which sees nothing but the binding in a book. Books are not made for binding solely; but, first, to support the paper trade; second, to be read; third, and lastly, to be bound when my 'thick' paper comes away like a pack of cards in the reader's hands."

But the answer is that there is not one desirable quality which thick paper has over a delicate laid paper, except that it makes a short book look a trifle longer. It is *not* stronger; it is not less subject to stain and damp; it is not nearly such a joy to handle, and knows

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nothing of that caressing habit of fifteenth century paper gliding under the finger-tips like silk and ivory.

Let us not be deceived; our book-despising neighbor who some day, when we are out, slips in and surreptitiously turns down a corner of our "thick paper" copy is the most admirable of iconoclasts—a worthy breaker of unworthy idols.

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VI

OF EDGES AND EDGE GILDING

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VI

OF EDGES AND EDGE GILDING

"Belin. . . . Now pray, sir, inform us what is meant by that strange term, Uncut copies?

"Lysand. Of all the symptoms of bibliomania, this is probably the most extraordinary. It may be defined, a passion to possess books of which the edges have not been sheared by the binder's tools. And here I find myself walking upon doubtful ground. . . ."

Dibdin; Bibliomania.

THE book should be left as long as possible in the giant embrace of the standing press. Here it dries and hardens—"sets," so to speak, and from a semi-fluid takes solid, final form.

The next step in binding is the treatment of the edges. The choice is wide. The Bibliophile may leave the edges untouched, in the virgin yet crass state in which the printer left them. Or, the edges may be cut and full gilt; or, gilt on the top only, "other edges uncut"; or, while uncut,

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they may be gilded "on the rough." Or, the trimmed edge may be treated with a single color; or, lastly, they may be marbled.

We may exclude, however, the last treatment, as it is unlikely that to-day any bibliophile will have marbled edges, save only when the marble is covered with a burnished shield of gold.

All bibliomaniacs, and a host of bibliophiles as well, will rise up to say that, to the true book-lover, there are but two possibilities — edges innocent of any treatment, or, at the most, a top edge slightly trimmed and gilded.

What then is the philosophy of uncut edges? Are they a thing of beauty? No. Do they preserve the book? No; they are the receptacle of dust and a high road to all enemies of books. Let us take the collector's own reasons, which surely are the best. To begin with, the untrimmed book is as the author first beheld it. All the illusive joys of his literary paternity were associated with an object such as this. A valid reason, surely, but note that the

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same reason can be advanced against any *rebinding* whatsoever. The original book, as the poet handled it, was in somber stamped cloth or fragile boards. Preserve it thus, and no man can blame you. Second, says the man of uncut edges, My book will bring a higher price. True — in most instances — if it be left in its primal cover. To the bibliophile who advances these reasons there is no reply. But note that for the same reasons he will not have his book rebound at all; and thus it ceases to be a question of bookbinding. We exclude also the *Bibliomane* who cherishes his copy unbound in the original folded sheets. He can advance nothing for his aberration, except that it is in the best state for binding. Therefore he retains it coverless. Not thus did the poet dream to see his book, nor in this form did he love it. Why not collect the type from which the book was printed, or the pulp from which the craftsman made the paper? Both are very "early states."

But leaving this folly, let us turn to the man who intends to have his book

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rebound, sparing neither thought nor money to achieve the best result. Among these, too, you will find him who, in a book clad in the finest levant, crushed, polished and tooled by the best artist, will yet retain the edges in the pristine state. Such an one advances various pleas. First, he finds beauty in the deckle edge. He cherishes even those folds which have escaped the paper cutter. Let not the profane tell him that he cannot read the book. We grant that none but a Philistine could make this trivial retort. And equally foolish is it to dwell upon the difficulty of turning uncut leaves. No patience is too minute for the true collector. In such pains lies the voluptuousness of his cult. He turns the leaves, cut or uncut, one by one, as something precious. He is like the miser, handling in secret his treasure piece by piece. 'Tis for these delights that he is a bibliophile.

No, the one who thus rebinds a book can not justify it on the plea of beauty. At this point I take issue. Keep the book uncut in its

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original cover and we may all go with you, smiling, hand in hand. But if you rebind it, through choice or through necessity, have it rebound in the fullest sense. Have a perfect and coherent product. With half-bindings one may leave the "other edges uncut;" but there is an artistic solecism in full leather, richly tooled, in conjunction with crude edges, hideously white. Whatever artistic fitness they may have had in sober cloth, is lost the moment that one binds in leather.

"But," one answers, "to cut the edges leaves my book the smaller. Elzevirs, as one knows, are valued by millimeters and are treasured like diamonds for the fraction of a carat." True. But to the plea of beauty, and the plea of value, there are two replies. Beauty of margin lies in proportion, not in size. Fair margins are always fair when contrasted with a hideously cropped "bouquin" where the text struggles for breathing space. Yet were octavo pages struck on sheets in folio, would they be more beautiful? William Morris, preoccupied chiefly

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with the cult of beauty, found in moderate margins the truest loveliness. There is no sanctity in waste paper.

If one hark backward a little, one will find, I think, the true key to the rage for uncut copies. In the past, binders sinned cruelly against the books they bound. Even the great Le Gascon is charged with a keener eye to a well filled shaving tub than to elegance of margin. Head lines and signatures were nothing to these ancient craftsmen. The book collectors of the past sought fair margins because it was difficult to find a book with any margin; and we of to-day have transmuted a natural and just desire for beautiful unmaimed books into a stubborn prejudice. We seek excessive margins, rather than those of the just proportion which is beautiful. All extremes are evil, and this excess but a trifle less so than the evil that it sought to cure.

Still the collector asks: "Then what am I to do? My precious copy was, as you say, profaned by the Philistine. Shall it be cropped again, adding to the evil?"

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Certainly not, nor is it necessary. The book, though already cut, may be full gilt "on the rough," and the amount of margin to be sacrificed will be microscopic. The modern binder manages this in several ways. For example, before sewing the loose signatures are knocked to a level and then gilt on each successive edge. Thus only the slightest scraping is necessary. Instead of cutting down the large sections to the dimensions of the small ones, the latter are raised, temporarily, to the level of the former. Then, after gilding, the book is sewed, and the tops of the sections only are brought into alignment. The other edges fall where they will. Nothing has been lost in size, yet the edges are full gilt, are, in fact, in the only possible artistic harmony with the decorated cover. The effect is often, to my mind, finer than a solidly gilt edge. The mosaics at Ravenna, in which the tesseræ are not polished to a level, reflect the light from a thousand gilded facets — incomparably deeper and more brilliant than a polished surface. The

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same beauty may be found in the unequal surface of rough gilt edges.

With new books, yet untrimmed, the small amount of margin necessary to solid gilding may well be spared, if a solid edge is wanted. The modern binder, smarting under the taunts of generations of book-lovers, is wiser than his ancestor. He respects margins, even in cutting them, and as one turns the pages he will find many untouched with gold, "witness" leaves or "*temoins*," showing both the discretion of the craftsman and the original amplitude of the smaller pages. It is even possible to gild on deckle edges.

Thus it seems, if a book is to be rebound at all there is no sound reason for anything but full gilt edges.

It is not my intention to enter into the technical details of edge gilding; they are abstruse and minute. Success is difficult to any but the skilled craftsman, and there are probably more ways of failing than in any other step in bookbinding.

There are many charming variations in solid gilt edges. One may have a

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mat surface, unpolished, often harmonious with a very ancient tome. One may have the edges gauffered or tooled —another practice which is very ancient. Elaborate as it may seem, it is historically in touch with the oldest books. Then there is gilding over marble—a favorite embellishment of the French. Then again landscapes may be painted on the edges which are then gilded. The picture shows only when the book is opened. This is an English practice; yet a landscape on a book edge seems out of place, and must rank among the curiosities of the craft. There is no reason, however, why painted arabesque designs should not be used.

Such are the refinements of edge treatment. But edge *gilding*, to my eyes, is not a refinement, but necessary to the full bound book. Still, all styles to all tastes. The present fashion proclaims the sanctity of virgin edges. It lies with the future to decide, when some day, in that great judgment hall of books—the auction room—the sheep shall be divided from the goats.

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VII

OF HEADBANDS

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VII

OF HEADBANDS

THE headband serves a double purpose — strengthens the book at a weak point, and raises the back to the same height as the projecting boards. And, moreover, though serving these wholly utilitarian ends, it invariably effloresces in a bit of decoration — crowns the work with brilliant woven silk.

The true headband is made by hand, and, in the making, is sewn into the back. It is thus integral with the book; and the strips of vellum or catgut on which the strands are wound are, in fact, additional bands, and serve the same ends as the others, binding the sections together at a point where they are held by no other sewing. The earliest headbands were, in fact, merely

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the terminal bands on which the book was sewn. They were stretched on the sewing press with the other bands, and, like them, afterwards laced into the boards. Ancient headbands done in this fashion stand out from the back with the other ribs. The same effect in modern work may be seen in some of the beautiful pig-skin bindings by Mr. Cobden-Sanderson. In these, however, the projection is merely a decorative feature, in touch with the archaic typography of the Kelmscott books. The ends of the headbands are not laced into the boards; and indeed the strength thus gained would be off-set by a corresponding weakness, for in covering the book the leather where it is turned in must be cut to admit the band. This cut at a point where the leather is always flexed in opening the book would, in a moderate sized volume, be a point of weakness. But in large and heavy folios having a thick turn-in of leather, a headband sewn with the book and laced into the boards would be an ideal treatment both to the technical and the artistic eye.

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As to the materials for headbanding: The ground work should be a strip of vellum, if a vertical headband is wanted, or, for the fat round headband of our forefathers, a piece of cat-gut of the proper size. Of the two, the round headband is, I think, the stronger; but the vertical is more delicate and of finer grace. Then, too, there are double and triple decked headbands woven on as many strips.

For fine books there is no excuse for weaving the bands with anything but silk—save, sometimes, for added gorgeousness, a gold thread may be added to the others. Two or more colors may be mingled on the headbander's loom (her fingers)—or she may work in a single hue, if such be the artistic call of the moment. If the edges are gilded there seems to be no brilliancy of headband which does not fit the soberest of covers. With plain morocco innocent of tooling, a bright headband is a catch point—pleasing the eye, giving richness to the whole. On uncut edges virgin white, or on edges of a solid color, a headband of a single color

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would seem to be the better choice.

It is apparent, of course, that in all cases the colors of the band, be it one or many, must harmonize with the color of the leather. Of a different color it should always be, but always of a color in harmony.

As was said, a hand woven headband strengthens the book — how greatly will depend upon the number of times the weaver has passed her needle through the back. This may be once in every sixth or seventh turn; or, more honestly, it may be every second or third turn — the oftener the better.

All bibliophiles, lingering at the old book stalls, have noticed that even in the most dilapidated books the headband continues to hang by a thread or two long after the surrounding leather has passed the way of all flesh, dust unto dust. The remnant may be shaky and infirm, needing but a slight pull to dislodge it wholly. Yet it has outlasted the leather it was destined to support. In such cases one usually finds that the band was held to the book only by a stitch

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or two in the whole width of the back. It *never was* firm; and it was largely because of this that the covering perished. Its purpose was support; in this it failed. Every time the book was pulled from the shelf the ill-sewed headband cast the strain upon the leather — thus it perished.

In truth a firm, well made headband is a great strength to a book. Though small, gay, and of frivolous attire, it should, so to speak, have a heart of steel. Next to the joints there is no part of a book which meets a greater strain.

What then is to be said of the machine-made headbands, manufactured by the yard and merely pasted to the back for decoration? Nothing, except that they are not for the best books of the bibliophile; are, indeed, properly for no book in full leather and expected to have a healthy lease of life. In trade binding they are a commercial necessity; and, it is true, serve the purpose for which they are invented; but there is no excuse for putting them on any "extra" book. Hand work in

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headbanding is neither difficult nor long to learn, and not many minutes are wasted in weaving it into the book.

It is small—to the eye a mere detail—but it is through excellence in details such as this that the book, coquet at all times, is doubly so—decked to fascinate, entrap, and slay the doting Bibliophile.

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VIII

OF THE CHOICE OF LEATHERS

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VIII

OF THE CHOICE OF LEATHERS

THE selection of leather for covering is most important. On it depends not only the beauty of the book, but, more vital, on it depends the durability of the work. The covering is far more than decoration or outward show; it is a structural element. Nothing except the sewing is so important. The boards when merely laced to the bands are neither firm nor permanently fixed. It remains for the leather to hold them to their proper place, and, an adjunct to the sewing, to bind section to section firmly, yet flexibly.

From earliest times leather has been felt to be the natural covering for books. Of all materials it unites the two desiderata, strength and flexibility.

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That sort of leather which above others has these qualities is, above others, the best for binding.

Yet in all ages books have been bound in silks, velvets, or other cloths — these often charming with embroidery in gold and colors. But such covers are perishable, as the collector knows, and it is difficult to find early specimens in reasonable condition. Cloths are with difficulty held by glue or paste; they are feeble ligaments, soil quickly, and the decoration in relief is easily destroyed.

Skins of almost all beasts have been used in covering, but morocco or goat skin, calf, pig skin, and vellum have found the greatest favor. Beyond all question morocco is the king of binding leathers. It has the greatest strength, durability, and beauty. Books in "contemporary morocco" are the prizes of the collector. These are generally found to be "choice" copies — choice they were in their own day, when singled out for the expensive honor of morocco.

The goat himself has few virtues; all

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ages have condemned him. In Attic groves he was ever a terror to the tender nymph, a follower of wine-bibbers, and of general ill repute. Yearly he wandered in the desert, bearing the sins of a whole people on his horny pate. At some future day we know he is to be divided from the sheep. Always is he typical of evil. But this merit, if no other, he has above other beasts; his hide is tough. Properly tanned in sumach he is transmuted to a thing of beauty, suffers a "sea-change" into something fair, and is honored above the very clay of Cæsar.

> And then to thy once shaggy breast,
> Now purified, shalt thou enfold
> Frail Manon and fair Juliet.

So sings some forgotten bibliomaniac. We despised him living, but we prize him dead. Such injustice is common to us.

To speak of him when thus transformed: There are moroccos of many kinds. Chief and most valued by the modern mind is what is known as levant — so called because in early times the skins finest in quality and

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tannage were brought from Turkey and the Levant. These had not the grosgrain which we now expect to find in our levant. Such graining is of course wholly artificial, a surface finish obtained by the pressure of incised plates. Nor does it by any means prove superior treatment, for, if anything, it lessens the durability of the skin by hardening its fibre. The old levant moroccos were mostly of smooth finish. Their charm and notability lay, not in graining, but in the fine dye and finish. Often in fact these old moroccos are difficult to distinguish from superior calf.

To-day we see little smooth morocco on our finer books. Everything is crushed levant, and, beautiful as this is, the style grows monotonous. There is a charm in smooth morocco when delicately handled—a charm peculiar and antique. It is the most fitting and natural surface for a minutely tooled design. One hopes that the taste of the Bibliophile may swing this way, were it only for variety. Moreover, I think that all connoisseurs must feel that the

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older the book, the more sympathetic is a smooth morocco. It is venerable in its fashion, associated with the past and the masterpieces of the craft. There is too much of the later nineteenth century about our crushed levant to sympathize with the dignified beauty of early printing. It is this feeling doubtless that has led many binders and bibliophiles to clothe early books in pig skin or in vellum—a discriminating taste. But none the less is a smooth morocco in equal touch with such books. There is ample precedent.

Calf was at one time a noble and enduring leather—preserving in great beauty many of our most prized books. Our modern calf—so fair as it issues from the binder's hands—is worthless in the majority of cases. There is probably no collector who does not associate hopelessly cracked joints with modern polished calf. One looks forward to the catastrophe as inevitable. Yet, cheek by jowl, stands a calf binding of the seventeenth or eighteenth century, reasonably sound, sure to outlast our latest binding. The same

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defects exist in the so-called Persian morocco, vying with calf on the easy road to ruin.

Where lies the difficulty? Why should the old book have still a longer term of years ahead than the new one? Though the reason is simple, its elements are obscure. The problem has been largely solved by the admirable report of the committee appointed by the English Society of Arts to inquire into the causes of the decay in modern leather. No collector or librarian can afford to be without this report, or the vital part of it as stated by Mr. Douglas Cockerell in his recent book, *Bookbinding and the Care of Books.* I refer the reader to these. It is enough to say here that the facts prove that of all leathers, ours of to-day is probably the worst that man has ever tanned. Some are better than others, but none as good as they could easily be made. And note that physical strength is no true test of merit. A new leather which tears with difficulty may yet crumble rapidly to dust, while another, apparently weaker, may long outlast it.

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Nor is it use that kills the leather — on the contrary, use, like exercise to man, is beneficial. The vice lies deeper. The true devil lurks in the tannery, aciduously incarnating himself in fair forms of levant and calf, to issue and unman the bibliophile as in old days by the same juggle he wrung the soul of Anthony. We, like the faithful saint, fall only because we do not know the trick.

With the new light shed on the causes of decay we may look forward to a day when our markets and binderies shall be stocked with sound and wholesome leathers. The goat builds up his cuticle as of old and after the old manner, and we likewise, returning to old tastes and fashions, will learn to tan him as aforetime.*

One must not, however, think too hardly of the tanner. The results in the past, as in the future, rest largely on the shoulders of the Bibliophile.

*Several English firms are already manufacturing leathers which are guaranteed to be made according to the specifications of the Society of Arts, among others Messrs. J. Merideth-Jones & Sons, of Wrexham.

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There has been a fault in taste. We have demanded a leather of the highest surface finish, perfectly uniform in tone and brilliant in coloring. As we will take no other, the manufacturer has been driven to supply it. A purely natural leather is not uniform in tone and texture. It is often full of varying tones, mottled and shaded, the more so the more it shows its natural texture. This is exampled most clearly in the so-called Niger morocco, tanned by the natives on the Niger River by primitive methods. Books bound in this leather show a graining as rich and varied as old mahogany — effects charming and to be desired. Still, a uniform color is not incompatible with wholesome tannage. In general, leather should look like leather, should be allowed its own and natural beauty. If we accept the canon, the problem of sound leather is largely solved. Perhaps, also, our taste shall be purged of certain crudities.

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IX

OF COVERING

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IX

OF COVERING

THOUGH the problem of covering may seem one for the craftsman, there are points good and bad which should be understood by the collector who is studying the problems of the art.

When the skin is selected the workman pares it in the proper places. Leather as it comes to the bindery is too thick for any but the largest books —fit for none without some paring. Without paring the delicate cap to the headband could not be formed, the corners could not be turned-in neat and square—the work would be lumpy and uncouth. The smaller the book, the thinner the leather must be pared. But there is danger in paring. Leather is not homogeneous in structure, as may

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be seen in any enlarged sectional drawing of human or other skin. The center and foundation layers are the strongest, a web of interwoven fibres; but as we approach the surface the structure is less closely knit, the fibres more vertical. It follows, irrespective of questions of thickness, that the less paring the better. It follows again that the cautious binder will select a small and naturally thin skin for covering small books.

Here is the difficulty: The places where of necessity the most paring must be done are the places subject to the greatest strain. Thus: For the folding of the neatest corner the leather must here be very thin; yet all bibliophiles know the fragility of corners. For a neat and graceful cap to the headband the leather must be thin; yet as one knows the cap is deeply tinctured with mortality. For the covers to open freely, for them to turn on "silken hinges," the leather must be thin at this point; yet there is no catastrophe more common than a broken joint.

The problem is stated. The beauties

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most loved of the Bibliophile, the square corner, neat cap to the head-band, and the free joint, are to be had in their last perfection only at our peril. Of some books as of some women it may be said that they have the fatal gift of beauty.

The Bibliophile sees that the binder is not to be charged with the iniquity. It is an inherent vice, a sort of original sin in bookbinding, inexplicable, like all evil to the eyes of our desire.

One should not be over zealous for "silken hinges." It is best to prize a temperate, wholesome beauty in our books. We must remember that in covering, the craftsman is ever betwixt the devil and the deep sea; that he can, if we urge him, easily enchant us by a free use of the paring knife. If he refuse, we should hold him as an honest man who has never thought in his heart, *Apres moi, le déluge.*

Still, books must open graciously and be fair to see. The consummate craftsman finds the golden mean. He

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has at hand many little matters of technical finesse which enable him to work with sound material.

I will not discuss the manipulations of the coverer. In these articles it is not sought to initiate the reader into the art and mystery of bookbinding; but rather to offer a few suggestions to the book-lover as a judge of binding — to do a little to minister to the polite pleasures of the connoisseur. Methods are described only that their merits may become more clear.

There are a few points still to be considered. Putting aside tooling, we have still the crushing, the polishing, the varnishing and pressing of the book.

Our present manner is to "crush" our moroccos and levants. The results are beautiful, necessary in fact to a small book covered with grosgrain leather. It is, likewise, a prerequisite to a high polish. To a certain extent, though not seriously, it weakens and makes the leather brittle. But there are artistic considerations. Many of our grained leathers are beautiful as they stand; they have artifice enough

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without the added artifice of crushing —undoing what was first thought worthy to be done. On large books, and especially on old books, an uncrushed grain is sympathetic. Blind tooling looks especially well on uncrushed leather.

Varnish is a preservative when considerately used. It should, however, be like the hidden coat of mail, which, unobtrusive, deflects the dagger thrust. It should not be pompous and aggressive; though it is well to bear in mind that time will dull and mellow the highest polish. Leather left neat has a charming effect when the book is new; but it is not fortified against finger marks, damp and scratches, as when lightly varnished.

The craftsman deems his labor ended when, at last, the book is resting in its final pressure, growing shapely, firm and flexible—a work which he can turn over with an honest pride, but with a pleasure measured largely by the appreciation of its owner.

Who more to be envied, artisan or connoisseur?—there are psychic and

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social problems in the heedless question, and, like Pilate, one cannot "wait for an answer." There is a moment of pathos, however, in the birth of all the works of man, and no less in the birth of these little *objets-d'art*, these books fresh from the binder, launched on the perilous journey. All things are mortal, passing; and this like the others. Beautiful, its days are numbered; but for the hour it is none the less alive, contributing in its small way to our pleasure. In this may the pleasures of the Bibliophile be set above other pleasures: They are innocent; they are intensified by knowledge.

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PART SECOND

FINISHING: THE TECHNIQUE OF TOOLING IN GOLD

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I

GOLD TOOLING: THE TECHNIQUE

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I

GOLD TOOLING: THE TECHNIQUE

THE trade secrets of the ancient masters have not come down to us, nor would these to-day serve more than to satisfy our curiosity. The merits of the old tooling are those of the design, and the modern craftsman has at command receipts and processes which, from the standpoint of technical results, surpass those of the past.

The theory of tooling in gold is very simple; the practice is rich in difficulties. Each leather calls for some slight modification of the formula. From the craftsman's point of view all leathers are divided into two classes: porous (represented by calf) and non-porous (typified by morocco). The former requires some preliminary treatment to fill the pores and make a firm ground for the tooling. This is

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usually accomplished with a size made from vellum clippings, or a wash of starch paste diluted with vinegar. Morocco, having a more solid surface, may in most cases be worked as it stands.

The first step is making the design. It is done on paper with the tools themselves. Bit by bit the pattern is built up, each leaf, each flower, calling for a separate impression; each curve may mean the joining of several tools (gouges), each dot is separately impressed. Thus it is seen that the design on the cover of a book may represent many thousand motions by the craftsman.

The paper bearing the design is then fastened to the leather; the tools are heated, and again the workmen goes over the pattern, stamping it through the paper into the leather. When the paper is removed the design is seen tooled in "blind" upon the leather. The surface is then dampened, and the finisher, with a camel hair pencil fills the impressions with a size called glair. This is a solution of albumen in various combinations to suit the nature of the

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leather. The design is often glaired a second time. When the size is dry, the leather is lightly oiled, and one or more layers of gold leaf is laid on. When the leaf is pressed down with a ball of cotton the pattern is seen through the gold. Again the tools are heated to a temperature which varies with the leather and the size of the tool. Again the finisher goes over the design, each tool falling in its former trace. The heated tool coagulates the albumen, which, in its turn, fastens the gold where the tool has struck. The surplus gold leaf, held but lightly by the oil, is rubbed off with a bit of flannel. The book is tooled. Such is the philosophy of tooling; very simple in theory, a matter of patience and accuracy of hand and eye; but so perpetually is it complicated with obscure difficulties, that the ideal craftsmen in this kind are few and famous.

With these technicalities the connoisseur is not concerned. The question here is: What are the ear marks of fine tooling? At present I put aside matters of design.

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The gold: it should be clear, solid, and unbroken, in appearance a little burnished plate let into the leather, with contours clearly marked. If it be mottled, appear to be burnt in, the craftsman used his tool too hot. If it be broken or imperfect, there was not heat enough. If his skill of eye or hand failed him, the impression is "doubled"; he did not strike exactly in the blind impression. The gold should appear to be inlaid; that is to say, it should be sunk below the surface of the leather. Thus it is protected, is permanent and sound. Many a fine piece of early craftsmanship has perished, or sadly worn, because the tooling lay upon the surface. But a vice lies in the other extreme; the leather may be too deeply scored or even burned through to the boards.

All these are faults easy to be marked. But the connoisseur must judge further. He must discern hand tooling from the tread of the stamping press, must distinguish the glittering track of the "roll" from the laborious composition built up of minute tools in patient

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repetition. This brings one to consider the tools themselves.

First is the isolated hand tool, the unit, which takes artistic value through its relation with its fellow tool. These are the *petits fers;* the single leaf, the dot, the flower, or petal of a flower, each of which must fall again and again in its proper place to result in a design.

Second, there is the composite tool; the complete spray of leaves, or leaves and flower, or arabesque, struck as a whole by hand, or, if large, by the stamping press. These tools resemble in character the *fleurons* with which the eighteenth century printer graced his pages. Many of them are charming in themselves; but in tooling they are a ready made art, so to speak. The design is not that of the finisher, but that of the engraver. When once their nature is understood they can always be distinguished.

And, third, of the same nature is the roll. The roll is a wheel on whose edge is engraved a complete running design. This is rolled from point to point by the finisher; and there results

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a pattern made up of minute elements, but struck as a whole, not piece by piece. Of such, usually, are the "inside borders" of the cataloguer; and of such, sometimes, are his "outside borders" as well. With a little study they can always be detected. Look at the corners where the pattern meets. It seldom mitres, but overlaps, or is clumsily filled in by a corner ornament.

Fourth, there is the large composite block, struck by the arming press, named because the block so struck was usually the coat armour of the owner of the book. This must ever be a legitimate embellishment. Books so decorated include many of the choicest specimens of the collector. Arms royal, arms of prelates and warriors, arms of fair bibliophiles, learned or unlearned, virtuous or too fair, were struck thus by the arming press. Such a composition is, in general, too large of face to be impressed by the arm alone. Still, in more recent practice, coats-of-arms are built up, piece by piece, where the design is not too intricate and there are no mantles or supporters.

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Works of the finest sort must always be done with tools of the first class, the *petits fers*. A little study will enable the Bibliophile to know them. Search for the composite tool and roll. If these be absent, one may be sure that the design was wrought bit by bit, was a work of patience, skill and long labor; unless, indeed, the whole design was machine-struck from a solid plate bearing the complete design. But as to this the connoisseur can never be deceived. The machine is not made which in vivacity, variety, brilliancy and beauty of touch can approach the hand of man. Hand tooling has a sparkle of its own, and life in it which cannot be mistaken. The tools, falling each in its turn, fall always at a slightly varying angle. They are not, and cannot always be held in true perpendicular to the surface of the leather. Thus the work has a thousand minute fascets, each with its own angle of reflection; and as the book moves in one's hand, it has ever a new aspect. It retains the emotions of the nerves that wrought it. It sparkles.

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II

GOLD TOOLING: THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

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II

GOLD TOOLING: THE RENAISSANCE IN ITALY

WHAT man loves he beautifies, — the instinct is inevitable, as native to the savage as to the connoisseur. There is little surprising, therefore, in the decoration of books. It would have been strange, on the contrary, if man, glorifying all the products of his hand and brain, should have left the corporeal substance which clothes his thoughts without grace or beauty. Some there have been, indeed, men of taste, who have thought it necessary to justify their instinct. Such was Pieresc, who, being asked why he should be at such great charge in book-binding, answered that "inasmuch as the best Books, when they fell into unlearned men's hands ill accoutred, were pitifully used; he therefore endeavored

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that they might be prized at least for the beauty of their binding, and so escape the danger of the Tobacconist and Grocer." The excuse was not needed; an excuse at the best. Pieresc was following a gracious instinct common to all men. Exterior decoration dates even with the earliest written records. The papyrus scrolls which Horace wrote reposed in cases rich with ivory and plates of gold. So it was and so it continued, until St. Jerome laments that books should be clothed in jewels while the poor go naked.

But to leave the age of manuscript when gold, carved ivories and gems were none too fine a dress for precious missals, and begin with bookbinding in the modern sense, at the period when leather, the fit material for clothing books, was first joined to the fittest mode of decoration, — gold tooling. Leather and gold tooling: the first calls for the latter. The fine intelligence of the Renaissance made the application, founding a true convention in book decoration which remains to this day.

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Gold Tooling: The Renaissance

The first gold tooling was done in Venice. Previously, in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, both in Italy and England, leather had been found to be the true material for covering; and in both of these countries "blind" tooling had been used, tooling without gold, executed with wooden or iron instruments. There are examples of such use not later than the tenth century. By the middle of the sixteenth century gold tooling was introduced, and, in a period of twenty-five years, about the time of Aldus Manutius, became common throughout Italy and known throughout Europe. As early as 1542 we read in a bill of Thomas Berthelet, binder to Henry VIII. of *a Psalter englisshe and latyne, bounde back to back in white leather gorgiously gilted on the leather;* and this the binder calls *after the facion of Venice.* In Venice, in truth, the art had its birth; but if we hark back further we shall find, perhaps, the source of the innovation in the style of those who practiced it. The tools of these early workmen were Arabic in character;

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and doubtless the art came from the Levant, with which the Venetians kept up continuous traffic.

One will see in this Italian tooling inevitable and recurring styles, Saracenic and Arabic beyond question. Look over any collection of these early bindings, or study them in illustrated treatises: you will see ever recurring the same design of running circles interlaced, the same rope pattern so characteristic of Saracenic art, and which is similar, strangely similar, to the interlaced patterns on early Celtic monuments.

The excellence of this Italian work does not have, it would seem, the full attention it deserves. To be sure we hear everywhere of Grolier, and, as all know, his early books were the handiwork of Italian artists. But the Italian work to which I refer is that which preceded, or was contemporaneous with this great collector. Grolier, a Frenchman, was the channel through which Italian art poured into France. Of him later; but it may here be said that his own individuality is stamped beyond

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mistake on all the work done for this prince of connoisseurs. Yet note that at the same time there flourished a style more native and Italianate. A characteristic example will be seen in the Commentaries of Cæsar, printed by Giunta and now in the British Museum. This style is far from Grolieresque, and is characteristic of a class widespread in Italy at that day. It has beauty, dignity, and a charm untiring, which are not found so unalloyed in the more gorgeous and flowing triumphs of the great French craftsmen. The Italian of the Renaissance accomplished beauty with few and rigid elements. He worked simply, his tools are obvious, so to speak, and he obtained this dignified and surpassing grace not in the tools themselves, but in the placing of them. The theme is simple — a panel merely — but with a fine eye for true proportion and the just measure between decoration and unembellished surface, more sensitive to mass than detail, he achieved triumphs of proportion which have never been surpassed. This was the native Italian

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genius, proportion — architectonic is the word some critics use — and where this quality, call it what you will, is found, will be found also the finest sentiment for form wedded to the finest sense of fitness.

There are two limitations under which every artist works, — his tools and the material; and in gold tooling far more than in other graphic arts is the tool a limitation. The tool is the fibre of the design, and, though a seeming paradox, the more elemental the tool, the greater the artistic freedom. The study of style becomes inseparable from a study of the tool, — the *piccoli ferri*. The first tools, Saracenic in character, foliage conventionalized beyond recognition, were made with solid faces. The result was heavy; broad surfaces of gold without the contrasts of light and shade which lighter tools make possible; though, in truth, the early Italian craftsmen obtained this gracious relief by fine contrast of gold and tooling blind. It was an advance, however, when tools were "azured," — the face made of horizontal lines as azure

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is marked in heraldry. Then followed tools in outline merely; and with these three, with tools solid, azured on in outline, the later Italian artists accomplished these marvellous books of Maioli and Grolier.

Thus far the advance was wholly on Italian soil; but with the return of Grolier to his native soil the seed was sown in France, which thenceforward, to our own day perhaps, became the land par excellence of binding. "*La relieure est un art tout Francais*," says M. Thoinan. True, perhaps, but let us not forget that in the art of binding as in other arts, the first vivifying impulse and first cry of the renascent soul of man arose in Italy. Remembering this and studying these earlier Italian bindings it may be that we will come to realize that in the art of binding, as in many arts, the first fruits were the best.

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III

GOLD TOOLING IN FRANCE

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III

GOLD TOOLING IN FRANCE

IT WOULD seem as if the Muses . . . had also applied themselves to the decoration of the outsides of the books, so much of art and *esprit* appears in their ornamentation. They are all tooled with a delicacy unknown to the gilders of today." So wrote Vigneul de Marville, speaking of Grolier's books in 1725. But the words would have applied with still greater force in the sixteenth century, when Grolier brought his superb collection from Italy into France. These books were a revelation to the Treasurer-General's compatriots; and the French binders of that day, gathering thereby new inspiration, began that surpassing national school which

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was to make bookbinding a truly Gallic art.

Without doubt the integrity and tradition of the art in France owe largely to the guild of St. Jean Latran, dating from the middle ages. The guild included all the fabricators of books—printers, binders, stationers—though it is interesting to note that upon the introduction of gold tooling a quarrel arose between the guild and certain workmen, who had not the freedom of the guild, but who practiced tooling, though their proper *métier* was gilding boots and shoes. It is probable that the earliest French gilders united the trades of boot and book embellishment. This has been doubted by some authorities; but I may call attention to the trademark of Guyot Marchant, printer and bookbinder, who flourished in the fifteenth century, in which is depicted the leather worker cobbling with a strap across his knee after the fashion of all good cobblers.

But as to French binding there are questions more important. Who were the craftsmen who tooled these early

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books? To the artist truly should belong the fame; yet, unfortunately, the names of those who conceived these flowing arabesques are generally unknown; and the books are named from the collectors who placed them on their shelves.

But one name stands out with certainty: that of Geofroy Tory, an artist versatile. It is known that he designed letters for Grolier, his contemporary. But it is doubtful if any of his bindings were done for this collector. His style is Italianate, clearly to be seen in a volume of Petrarch bound by him, now in the British Museum. Here is the panel theme, enclosed in an outer border of interlacing Saracenic circles. The source of both is evident; and we mark here the infiltration of the Italian Renaissance into Southern France, where Tory lived and wrought. On his work is seen the *pot cassé*, the broken vase, his trade mark and sign manual. His work can be identified.

Not so, however, the work of many craftsmen still more skillful, who, under the influence of Grolier, wrought those

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books of Henry II. and Catharine his Queen, wrought also for the fair Diane, whom Henry styled faithlessly his "*seule prinsese.*" The names of these masters are unknown, or, at the best, rest in conjecture. In their styles will be found impulses truly Grolieresque; styles I say advisedly, for here in France, as in Italy, coexisted tooling of different *genres*, and with that which was Italian much that was wholly French. Such was the *semis*, or powder, wherein the covers were strewn with *petits fers* regularly repeated. This manner is feeble, but national and ancient, dating from the middle ages. It occurs on many royal bindings, and was a favorite with Nicholas Eve, one of the first of that family of binders. For one must always bear in mind that, among French craftsmen, the trade descended from father to son; and well-known names such as Eve, Padeloup, Derome, often stand for several generations. Styles, as well as name and skill, become hereditary, and it is often impossible to assign to the particular artist a particular example of the art.

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And let us remember that individual craftsmen worked in several styles. Thus the Eves used not only the *semis*, but also another manner peculiarly French, in which the field is divided into numerous compartments, each linked to the other by bands of twisted fillets. These compartments are variously filled, some with spiral arabesques, some with isolated *petits fers*, and still others with little laurel branches, — bindings "*à la fanfare*," as later they were dubbed by Nodier.

If one might be so bold as to characterize one style out of many, as most typical of Gallic art, it would be this, the binding *à la fanfare* with its twisting, curvilinear strap-work. It is, so to speak, the rectangular strap-work of Grolier, passed through and transmuted by French genius into something new and different. Here the nobility of Italian form becomes in French hands over-refined, somewhat prettified into the national ideal.

We see this strap-work later on, revived, forming the fundamental structure for the style of the greatest of

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French artists, — Le Gascon, the mysterious, the almost mythical master craftsman. His existence even is denied; but on conclusive evidence he lived and tooled covers generally acknowledged to be triumphs of the art.

It will be remembered that the Italians gradually lightened the faces of their tools, using first the solid face, then tools azured, then tools merely outlined. In Le Gascon this evolution reached a final stage in France, and his *petits fers* were but a string of minute dots, — tools *au pointillé*. With these he filled the compartments which the Eves designed before him. The effect was incomparably brilliant; dazzling, lace-like spirals were set against each other in fine profusion. Mr. Horne points out that the spirals of Le Gascon lack in structural relation — do not, indeed, spring one from the other with the finest sentiment of form. But beyond doubt Le Gascon stands artist *par excellence* in the history of binding, and he is so ranked by Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, than whom there is probably no judge more competent.

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In Le Gascon we have the climax of French tooling; thenceforward begins the history of an art in its decline.

Le Gascon was working in 1622, while in 1684 Luc Antoine Boyet was living at Paris in Rue des Sept Voies. To him is credited the style called Jansenist, still in high favor with the amateur. The Jansenist binding has no gilding or other ornament on the exterior, save only a blind fillet edging the covers. Named from the Jansenists of Port Royal, the style embodies their ascetic and severe ideal. But even here the gilding denied to the outside was lavished on the *doublure*, or inner lining of the cover. This lining, made of leather, was elaborately tooled with a deep *dentelle*, or lace-like, indented border. At this point the craft has reached a higher technical accomplishment. Here, as in other arts, a decline in genius is offset by a gain in craftsmanship. Padeloup was binding at this period and is famous for mosaics of gorgeous inlaid leathers, feeble in invention but gorgeous none the less. Here was another technical advantage,

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for the polychromatic effects of Grolier and the early Renaissance were mostly done with pigments, not in true inlay.

The *dentelles* which Boyet lavished on the *doublure* were transferred by the Deromes and Padeloups to the outer cover. The style, imitating the lace work of the period, is rococo and debased, a true reflection of the day, an art weak in structure, seeking the gorgeous chiefly, a child of the age, vainglorious, soon to be extinguished in the blast of revolution.

How inevitably art reflects the spirit of its day and incarnates the contemporary ideal! So it is even with this minor art of binding. At every stage it takes its keynote from the passing fashion.

To study the progress of the art in France is, in a little but not uninteresting way, to study the history of France, to observe its follies, the pomp of King and courtier, and to have part in the luxury of Queen and favorite. We catch in these gilded arabesques the glint and true lineaments of many old ideals. It is profitable, this study, as well as entertaining.

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One knows the style of Michael Angelo or Titian with reasonable precision. It is no harder, with a little study, to know the styles of masters in this minor art; whence comes added pleasures as one wanders through the museums of Europe, or handles, perchance, for a brief moment, the rare treasures of one's friend, the famous bibliophile.

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IV

THE GOLD TOOLING OF TO-DAY

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IV

THE GOLD TOOLING OF TO-DAY

MR. HORNE, in his admirable essay on book-binding, tells of a celebrated Parisian binder who used to show an original Grolier beside a copy made by himself, in which he had corrected all the curves of the original and executed the joints and mitres with absolute precision. As an example of technical skill the copy was a remarkable production; as a work of art, it was dull and lifeless, wanting "that vitality which comes of the error of the hand in spontaneous expression." Why should not the design of the old master, copied by a modern workman with far greater technical skill, be better than the original?

Here lies one of the mysteries of art, and also one of its essential truths:

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Fine art must ever be the *spontaneous* expression of brain and hand, following freely an original impulse which has mastered them.

All recent critics of the craft of binding agree that the modern workman, while excelling in all particulars of technique, misses too often that accomplished beauty which alone can justify his skill: and gold tooling is counted among arts decadent. This was true not many years ago. Is it true to-day? I think not. This art, as many others, is to-day renascent. And here it is endeavored to point out, or at least to suggest, the probable path of the new life before us.

This will best be done by analyzing artistic failures in contemporary work; and for this purpose there is nothing more instructive than to turn the pages of *La Relieure Moderne, Artistique et Fantaisiste*, by M. Octave Uzanne. Here are seen, finely illustrated, over seventy examples of what M. Uzanne deems the triumphs of contemporary French craftsmen. One fact stands prominent: almost without exception

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the examples which are not a shock to the beholder are those which are in confessed imitation of historic patterns. When the modern Gallic craftsman breaks with tradition, and embarks on the sea of his own fantasy, the result too often is distressing. One sees little birds billing about a nest, one sees small dancing figures, parasols or fans of gorgeous inlaid leather, one sees butterflies and sprays of flowers, naturalistic, tooled "so that it shall appear as if they had been thrown down carelessly." In these naturalistic efforts the craftsman is, in the words of Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, "developing his own dissolution and the dissolution of his craft."

Here does not one develop a canon of the art in question? This: Imitation of nature is not design; and design, not representation, is the true means of decoration. To illustrate this fact: Suppose one had a Turner enlisted in the craft, and he with some thousand *petits fers* should draw in gold on a book cover an exact replica of his most famous landscape. Would one have here a work of art? By no means,

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rather something unfit, something impossibly unfit, a hopeless and futile struggle, where the false tool sought to grave upon the false material a false ideal. And this would be so even if one conceived a technical success. But how impossible is technical success will be seen in the attempted "drawing" of the most skillful artisans of France, also without question the most skillful in the world.

But let it not be thought because in the examples cited success is found only in imitation of the past, that therefore in such imitation lies the highroad to success. To reproduce Grolier or Le Gascon is to-day nearly as sterile a performance as to stamp with a rigid tool a naturalistic spray of flowers. I say nearly as bad, because such imitation, however little it shows spontaneous conception, does at least seek the proper embellishment on the proper material with the proper tool.

But enough of modern failure: the moral is pointed.

Mr. Cobden-Sanderson, at one time a barrister and now one of the most

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original of English binders, represents the new life I mean. He stands an important figure, not merely because he has wrought bindings already valued at their weight in gold, but even more because he has written of his craft luminous and enthusiastic words which are the inspiration and the creed of a number of isolated and collected English binders. Indeed it seems now as if book-binding were no longer *un art tout Français*, but rather Anglo-Saxon.

Mr. Sanderson's main article of faith is that true art is contemporaneous. Great as are the old schools of Grolier, Eve, Le Gascon, they are closed forever. "The future is not with them or their development or repetition." The reason is simple, expressed in a syllogism: True art is self-expression; in book decoration such expression is through design; and (pithy saying!) "The designer in designing must — *design*."

Here one is at the root of modern failure. The average craftsman does not design, he copies; he remains artisan and does not aspire to be artist.

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What then is necessary to the future of the craft? This: first the impulse and then the power to design; to design, having ever a keen sensibility for the nature of the material and to the possibilities which lie within the tool. To genius these are instinctive. They were instinctive in the artists who wrought for Grolier, they were instinctive in the Eves and in Le Gascon, and thereby resulted native and surpassing styles, full of proportion, grace and balance.

Is one to conclude therefore that for the finest tooling one must have genius ready made? Yes and no. For the unique examples, genius; but for competent and excellent gold-tooling, wrought in a style that shall at once have beauty and reserve, there is needed chiefly study and instruction in the craftsman — study of what has been, and instruction in what should and shall be.

Already in England are springing up schools where the art is taught to workmen and apprentices. Such, for instance, is the Central School of Arts and

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Crafts in London, where Mr. Douglas Cockerell, an accomplished artist, teaches the English apprentice the ideal and method of his craft. Why not? The painter, the sculptor, the architect, do not spring full-born and competent masters without study or instruction. Mr. Cockerell was bred in the school of William Morris, and did much work for him in repairing and re-binding the chief treasures of his library. It was thus, or more probably through some native instinct, that he found that style at once racial and original which characterizes the books from his bindery. There is no artist working to-day whose work is so Anglo-Saxon in spirit, so rich and so reserved — so truly beautiful with the beauty which is proper to the book.

Indeed, the sterile period of the craft is past in England; and the leaven has spread to this country. Here and there binderies are springing up where beautiful and gracious work is done. And, at the same time, the public itself is awakening to the existence of a charming and historic craft in its midst; to

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the fact that it is as barbarous to dress one's best loved books in shoddy, as to cumber one's walls with crude or puerile pictures.

THE END

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